

# **FEATURING BEST PRACTICES OF STATE AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**

## **Academic Affairs**

### **Career Advantage Program (CAP)**

**Old Dominion University  
implemented this best practice  
in August 1995**

*Qualifying under the  
Best Practices catalogue*

3 Provide Capabilities

?????

?????232 Construct facilities

6. **Process Classification Number:** #312 - Deliver products and services to customers  
#322 - Enhance/upgrade organizational capabilities  
#344 - Management improvement and change

### **Best Practice Summary (how it works, how you measure it)**

While most staff working in American universities and colleges today enthusiastically endorse the notion of “education for education’s sake,” reality suggests that all parties involved – parents, students, faculty, employers, legislators – recognize the importance of new graduates’ ability to contribute immediately to the rapidly changing work force as soon as they are hired, not after the expensive, long-term in-house employer training. Knowing that students who have related experience are the first hired, and are hired into better jobs, Old Dominion University in the 1995 academic year, began a bold new program, the Career Advantage Program (CAP), designed to prepare Old Dominion University students for employment after graduation and, at the same time, afford those students a distinctive undergraduate education. The CAP guarantees every undergraduate student a practicum – internship, cooperative education experience, guided research, etc. – for credit in the major, prior to graduation.

All departments in the University's 65 undergraduate majors have an appointed CAP faculty member who supervises each practicum. Departments offer various alternatives which include internships, cooperative education, capstone classes and senior design or senior show classes. Additionally, the following universal criteria apply to all of these experiences:

- The practicum experience involves a significant writing experience
- Cooperative learning experiences are encouraged
- There is a focus on oral communication
- Students are encouraged to engage in and apply understanding of multicultural and international experiences
- Community program solving is encouraged
- Credit is granted in the major

This program was so successful in the first year of implementation that 1,398 students, or 23% of the total eligible students, had participated in the guarantee. Just three years later in the 1998-99 academic year, ODU reported that a full 50% of the total eligible student population took part in this CAP. To date, in excess of 12,000 students have participated in CAP.

## **Impact on the Process Organizational Performance (OUTCOMES)**

At Old Dominion University students gain more experience related to their fields of study; benefits accrue to a variety of populations. Students are more able to focus their studies when they apply what they learn in a work environment. Students who might consider leaving the university are retained in greater numbers if they believe that they are learning something which will have an impact on their lives after they graduate. Faculty observes the strengthening of academic programs and growth in enrollments based on students' perceptions that they can "use" what they are learning. Employers hire new graduates who have already established a strong work ethic and good work habits. Finally, the ODU Admissions Office points with pride to the Career Advantage Program and many parents cite this program as one of the deciding factors when their sons or daughters select Old Dominion University.

## **Best Practice Qualification**

Old Dominion University is the only doctoral granting university in the country to guarantee all undergraduate majors an internship, co-op or practicum experience in their major field of study. This launched the Career Advantage Program into a category unlike any other. CAP is considered a "best practice" on the ODU campus.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) accepted a presentation of The Career Advantage Program in the "Best Practices" category for the most recent national conference held in Dallas in 1998.

## **For Additional Information**

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